

# THE CLASSICAL WEEKLY

VOL. 48, No. 10

MARCH 21, 1955

WHOLE No. 1189

## CONTENTS

G. STEINER: The Skepticism of the Elder Pliny . . . . .	137
A LIST OF CLASSICAL SOCIETIES . . . . .	143
REVIEWS . . . . .	143
F. P. Johnson, <i>The Farwell Collection</i> (D. M. Robinson).	
Books Received . . . . .	144

C.A.A.S. Spring Meeting, Pittsburgh, April 29-30, 1955

### THE SKEPTICISM OF THE ELDER PLINY\*

To speak at all of the Elder Pliny as a 'skeptical,' i.e. as a skeptical person, is to fly in the face of a strong tradition. Even a cursory examination of most histories of literature and of science brings out a wealth of epithets like "indiscriminate," "uncritical," and, above all, "credulous." There is no need to extend the list. Everyone has heard the accusation and has heard it from many directions.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this paper is, even while granting the charge "in principle," to suggest a qualified case for the defense. This will bring out a side of Pliny which receives comparatively little attention (perhaps because it is less picturesque than his gullibility), but it is, nonethe-

less, significant and when it is considered along with the points usually stressed it serves as a reminder both about his methods of working and about the problem he faced. Both need to be considered when his work is evaluated.

#### I

The verbal reality of the skeptical element can be demonstrated by excerpts like these: "It is astonishing to what lengths Greek credulity proceeds! No lie is so shameless that it lacks a supporter" (HN 8.82);<sup>2</sup> "I think . . . it is useless . . . [but] some say no to this and add the superstitious suggestion that . . ." (21.146-147); ". . . there being a good deal of empty talk about this not only from the Magi but also from the Pythagoreans" (22.20); ". . . the Magi generally rave about this, claiming . . ." (25.106); and, "More conservative authorities have reported, but with equal untruthfulness . . ." (37.33).

\* This is a revision and development of a paper read in April 1953 at the University of Kentucky Foreign Language Conference. The author is deeply grateful to Dr. E. S. McCartney for reading and correcting the MS in one of its intermediate stages.

1. Typical statements may be found in the following: A. G. Amatucci, *La lett. di Roma imp.* (Bologna 1947) 74-75; J. W. Duff, *Lit. Hist. of Rome in the Silver Age* (London 1927) 364; M. Hadas, *Hist. of Lat. Lit.* (New York 1952) 306; H. J. Rose, *Handbook of Lat. Lit.* (2d ed., London 1949) 437; M. Schanz-C. Hosius, *Gesch. d. röm. Lit.*, II (4th ed., Munich 1935) 487ff.; C. Singer, *Short Hist. of Science* (Oxford 1941) 98; L. Thorndike *Hist. of Magic*, I (New York 1923) 44.

Two articles require mention in connection with the present topic. The first, Simon Sepp's "Skeptisches bei

Plinius" (Chap. 2 in *Pyrrhoneische Studien* [Erlangen 1893]), concerns echoes in Pliny from the Pyrrhonian tradition and not the skeptical attitude of mind which of course need not be restricted to any one school or movement. The second is W. Kroll's detailed discussion, s. v. "Plinius," *RE* 21 (1951) cols. 271-439. In his comments on Pliny's *Weltanschauung* (cols. 409-419) Kroll considers both sides of the question, but he seems more interested in Pliny's *Aberglaube* than in his *Skepsis*, hence in spirit he seems to agree with the authors cited above. 2. The text quoted or translated in this paper is that of the Jan-Mayhoff edition (Leipzig 1892-1906).

However, mere phrases are insufficient. Skepticism, as it is most needed in a person who is working with a plethora of material from manifold, secondary, and often highly questionable sources, cannot be a virtue if it is limited to a few random, platitudinous tags. It should rather be the product of a competent mind strenuously at grips with its subject. This suggestion calls for the examination of a group of passages to illustrate how Pliny attempted to deal with reports he mistrusted.

The most important category is "the wondrous." This comprises chiefly two areas: prophetic signs and other occurrences to which some supernatural or quasi-religious significance may be attached, and the entire realm of the "traveller's tale" — the report, usually at second-hand, of some highly extraordinary natural or social phenomenon. This is not to imply that Pliny's skepticism is never directed against statements about historical events or other, so to speak, questions of fact (see, e.g., 2.162 *fin.*; 5.12; 22.73; 35.122), but reports of the wondrous provided special temptations for the credulous vein in his nature. Now while examples for this discussion are taken from all parts of the *Natural History*, HN 10, which treats of birds, provides the formal point of departure in those quoted immediately below. There is an especially rich fund of folklore and traveller's tales about birds and, at the same time, birds are closely connected with omens and augury. The materials of HN 10 should have been a fairly typical set of challenges to acceptance or rejection as Pliny found them in his sources.

1. Pliny knows that a distant locale is fertile ground for marvelous tales and occurrences and so he remarks (10.132), "We have heard of unusual birds in the Hercynian forest of Germany whose feathers gleam like fires in the night; *in other forests nothing memorable occurs apart from the renown caused by distance.*"

2. But distance may be in terms of times (as Homer's day) as well as place (e.g. India),<sup>3</sup> and authorities can be a source of difficulty. Examples of all these points appear intertwined in 10.136-138:

*I consider the Pegasus birds with horse-shaped heads and the griffin with long ears and a terrible hook to his beak fabulous, as also are, to*

be sure, the *tragopana* which a good many report as being real . . . *And let not credence be given the sirens though Dinon the father of the renowned authority Clitarchus maintains that in India they exist and that they tear to pieces persons whom they have charmed with their singing and lulled to sleep. (137) A man who would believe that sort of thing would certainly also not reject the story that snakes by licking the ears of the seer Melampus gave him the power to comprehend the language of the birds . . . The scops, a kind of bird, is mentioned by Homer, (138) but I can neither grasp in my mind the odd dancing of these birds when they are luring their prey (which a great many persons*

THE CLASSICAL WEEKLY is published weekly from mid-November for sixteen issues, except for any weeks in which there is an academic vacation. Volume 48 contains issues dated December 13 (1954); January 3, 10, 24, 31; February 14, 28; March 7, 14, 21, 28; April 18, 25; May 2, 9, 16 (1955).

Owner and Publisher, The Classical Association of the Atlantic States. Place of publication, Fordham University, 441 East Fordham Road, New York 58, N. Y.

General subscription price, \$3.75 per volume in the Western Hemisphere; elsewhere \$4.25. Price to members of the C. A. A. S. \$3.25. All subscriptions run by the volume. Single numbers, to subscribers, 20 cents, to others, 30 cents prepaid (otherwise 30 cents and 40 cents). If Affidavit to invoice is required, 60 cents must be added to the subscription price. For residents of New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, and the District of Columbia, a subscription to THE CLASSICAL WEEKLY (or, alternatively, to the *Classical Journal*) is included in the membership fee of the C. A. A. S.; whose members may also take *Classical Outlook*, *Classical Journal*, and *Classical Bulletin* at special prices in combinations available from the Secretary-Treasurer of the C. A. A. S., F. Gordon Stockin, Houghton College, Houghton, N. Y.

Reentered as second class matter December 14, 1950 at the post office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Acceptance for mailing at special rate of postage provided for in the Act of February 28, 1925 authorized December 14, 1950.

#### STAFF

##### EDITOR

Edward A. Robinson.....Fordham University, New York 58, N. Y.

##### ASSOCIATE EDITOR

William H. Stahl.....New York University, New York 53, N. Y.

##### CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Lionel Casson.....New York University, New York 3, N. Y.  
Philip Mayerson.....New York University, New York 3, N. Y.  
Martin Ostwald.....Columbia University, New York 27, N. Y.  
John F. Reilly.....Sacred Heart High School, Yonkers, N. Y.

The reduced number of pages in issues 10 and 11 is purely an expedient to allow us to regain schedule with No. 12 (April 18, 1955). The volume is planned to contain its normal length of approximately 250 pages; cf. CW 48 (1954-55) 8.

3. For India as a "Never-Never Land, a convenient repository for fabulous monsters" (and for other matters germane to this paper) see Truesdell S. Brown, "The Reliability of Megasthenes," *AJP* 76 (1955) 18-33.

have recorded), *nor are the birds themselves now known*.<sup>4</sup> For this reason it will be much to discuss acknowledged facts.

3. The difficulty of countering a distinguished authority, which plagued Pliny in 10.136, had bothered him earlier in his chief account of the highly traditional phoenix. Of six sure references cited in the Jan index, four (7.153; 11.121; 12.85; 13.42) range from unquestioning acceptance (11.121) to strong skepticism (7.153) about stories concerning the *characteristics* of the bird. The outline of his main account (10.3-5) shows him wrestling with the real question of its *existence*: "*They report (ferunt) . . . that Arabia has a bird, noteworthy before all others (I am inclined to think fictitiously—haud scio an fabulose), the phoenix, the only one in the whole world and not seen very much . . .*" Pliny knows he should doubt but he worries because "(4) Manilius, that famous senator, distinguished for his very great learning . . . , gave the first and most careful Roman account of it." Here, as above, the eminence of an authority disturbs him (cf. 8.6; 9.10 and 90; 22.120; 30.63), but he continues with scorn in his report of certain imperial *hocus-pocus*:

(5) . . . [a phoenix] was even brought into Rome in the censorship of the Emperor Claudius . . . and exhibited in the comitium, a point which is recorded in the *Acta*, but nobody would doubt that the bird was a fabrication (cf. Tac. *Ann.* 6.28).

His skepticism seems more confident, however, in 29.29 where he is not embarrassed by the immediate presence of any high-ranking authority (and where he says he is offering practical cures). He proposes to start with recognized remedies (*confessis*) like wool and eggs. Their general availability apparently reminds him of rarer sources for cures, hence he continues with these words:

. . . There would be no lack of subject matter for a literary showpiece (*pompa*), if it were my pleasure to consider anything other than *factualness (fides)* in my work, seeing that among the first there are reported remedies derived from the ashes and nest of the phoenix, just as if its

*existence were an established fact and not a fable (ceu . . . id certum esset atque non fabulosum)*. It is a mockery of life to mention remedies which will return only after a lapse of a thousand years.

4. But Pliny's skepticism in connection with birds is not directed merely against stories of marvelous natural phenomena. It also touches augury, as can be seen in his chief account (10.34-36) of the screech owl (*bubo*), a traditional sign of calamity and disaster.<sup>5</sup>

. . . The *bubo*, a funereal bird and one strongly deprecated as an ill omen, especially at public auspices, inhabits deserted places, and not just abandoned ones, but those which are even threatening and inaccessible, a monster of the night, giving voice not to a song but to a groaning. (35) And so in cities or wherever it is seen by daylight it is a dire portent. Yet I know of several instances in which it has perched on private houses and has not proved fatal . . .

Now the specific arguments offered against the claims of these passages vary in stature. The objections to wonders reported from remote antiquity and inaccessible places could be phrased acceptably in a modern treatise. Direct, personal observation is always respectable. His attempts to ridicule claims, however, often seem rather weak and may actually be used in the absence of anything better to say. But the quality of the arguments is not the point at issue. That Pliny is willing to argue, despite the fact that he seems almost apologetic for not having negative evidence, implies that he felt some intellectual and personal compulsion, or else a strong social and external obligation, to express doubt or disbelief.

## II

A person knowing only the passages outlined above might conclude that, while the Elder Pliny was rather unsystematic in his thinking and his reasons for doubt were somewhat childish, he at least questioned the right things. He might even think the traditional epithet, "credulous," entirely unfair.

However, any impression that Pliny was a thorough-going skeptic can be dissipated quickly. HN 9 on fish, like HN 10 on birds, concerns a type of subject matter which is likely to be full of wondrous tales. Pliny echoes one of these

4. D'A. Thompson (*Glossary of Greek Birds*; 2d edn., Oxford 1936) s.v. "skôps," is puzzled by Pliny's skepticism here, feeling quite certain of the identification of the scops as the "Little Horned Owl." He notes that it is more nocturnal than Athena's owl and that it migrates from Greece in the winter, hence though fairly numerous in Greece it is actually rather rarely seen.

5. For a long list of exx. see A. S. Pease, *Publi Vergili Maronis Aeneidos Liber Quartus* (Cambridge, Mass., 1935), pp. 375-377. Cf. HN 2.144 for skepticism about another omen.

about the echeneis, "the ship-holder," when he says (9.79), circumspectly, "Ships are believed to travel more slowly when this fish clings to their keels, hence the name given it . . ." The statement, owing to the word *creduntur*, is qualified by at least a trace of doubt. In 32.2-4, however, the emphasis is very different, for after remarks about sea-currents, tides, and winds, he proclaims:

And yet against all these, though they work in harmony and are driving in the same direction, a single, tiny, little fish, called the *echeneis*, can hold its own. Let the winds blow and the storm blasts rage . . . : it bridle their onslaughts and tames the madness of the universe, not by any labor on its part, not by resistance or any other method, but merely by clinging. (3) . . . Alas for the vanity of mankind, when a little six-inch fish can stop and keep at a standstill prows armored . . . with brass and iron!

Pliny buttresses this almost poetic outpouring with a report that Mark Antony's praetorian ship was stopped by such a fish at Actium. There is a qualifying *fertur* in this passage, but he then continues on his own:

(4) Even in our time an echeneis held the ship of the Emperor Gaius as he sailed back to Antium from Astura . . . The cause was recognized right away, since his quinquereme alone out of the entire fleet was not making headway, and men jumped overboard immediately to search around the ship. They found it clinging to the rudder and showed it to Gaius . . .

Pliny, the skeptic who rejected the Claudian phoenix (10.5), extends full credence to the powers of Caligula's ship-holder! And there are almost countless similar passages (cf. 9.11.; also 7.86; 8.141; 18.45 *fin.*; 19.65-66; 28.30-33; 32.88). These are the basis for the unkind remarks by the historians of literature and of science. Further, the strands of credulity and skepticism are not far separated. Even a casual examination of *HN* 10 reveals there an almost regular alternation between the two attitudes.<sup>6</sup>

### III

Now how can these things be? The chances are that Pliny, as his attitudes shift in his writ-

ings, is being influenced by several factors, chiefly (1) his sources; (2) the traditions and intellectual atmosphere of his day; and (3) his personal traits (including the manner in which he worked).

That he is tied to his authorities seem incontestable.<sup>7</sup> In 7.8 he very frankly admits this:

. . . In most cases (*in plerisque*) I shall not give my own word, but rather will refer to the authorities who will be cited in connection with doubtful matters, only let there be no squeamishness about following the Greeks, seeing how their energy in these matters has been much greater and their interest of much longer standing.

This same rather simple trust is echoed, perhaps with a trace of irony, in 23.112: "One cannot sufficiently admire the interest and energy of the old-timers (*priscorum*) who have investigated everything and left nothing untried."

But even without these declarations or the mention of a single authority, Pliny's dependence upon others would be clear from passages which quote or paraphrase or obviously echo sections from extant authors. The mosaic quality of his work is perhaps sufficient explanation for the inconsistencies. If so, his reversal of emphasis in connection with the "ship-holder" would be the result of the absent-minded use of conflicting sources without sufficient cross-checking. Conceivably 9.79 derives from an author little less circumspect than Aristotle (*HA* 505b19-20) who himself remarks that certain persons use the echeneis as a love or legal charm yet makes no mention of its other "powers." But 32.2-4 (with an enthusiastic postscript in 32.6) sounds almost as if Pliny were responding to a newly received, perhaps reputedly firsthand report. But this detail is pure conjecture. In 7.188-190 Pliny argues with some eloquence against the immortality of the *anima*, presumably following a Stoic source (although pretty surely also voicing his own personal opinion);<sup>8</sup> yet in 11.277, perhaps under the momentary

6. Typical credulous passages (some of which agree with statements in Aristotle) follow: 10.7, 10 (*Ar. HA* 620a2); 12, 16, 25 (*HA* 563b14), 33 (*HA* 618b14), 41, 46, 49, 50, 58 (*HA* 597a6), 60, 95, 97 (*HA* 616a6), 126-127, and 188 (*HA* 552b15). Some skeptical passages likewise have Aristotelian parallels: 10.3-5, 19 (*HA* 563a5 and 615a8), 20, 32 (*GA* 756b14), 35-36, 44, 52, 63, 132, 136-138, 187 (cf. *GA loc cit.*), and 211.

7. The parallels from Aristotle cited in n. 6 are evidence for this. Of course, as Kroll (*op. cit.* n. 1), col. 413, remarks, in leaning upon his authorities he was merely doing as his contemporaries did.

8. J. W. Caspar, *Roman Religion as Seen in Pliny's Natural History* (Diss.: Chicago 1934), suggests a Stoic source, but regards the idea as completely Plinian. Kroll (col. 308) thinks the phraseology Pliny's but feels that it reflects the tone of popular Stoicism; for the quotation from 11.277 he favors (col. 319) a source like Posidonius.



influence of a jotting from another source, he speaks of the *anima* as the only part of a man destined to survive (*sola ex homine superfutura*). Note also that whereas in 4.88-89 he mentions the Arimaspi without comment about their physical appearance or their mode of life (although the dark hair of the Agathyrsi and the reputed — *si credimus* — happy existence of the Hyperboreans receive notice), in 7.10 he is willing to accept, ultimately from Herodotus and Aristaeus of Proconnesus, a report of the Arimaspi as one-eyed and continually engaged in warfare against griffins (the birds he rejects, incidentally, in 10.136). Even sharper is the contrast between 10.97 and 12.85. The former, resting basically upon Aristotle's hearsay report (*HA* 616a6), contains no protest:

In Arabia there is a bird called the *cinnamolgus* which builds nests from twigs of cinnamon; for trade the inhabitants bring down the nests by means of arrows weighted with lead.

The latter, derived from a source that combines details from Herodotus (3.111) and *HA* 616, is highly skeptical. The paragraph begins with "fabulose narravit" and ends with "his commentis":

There is a fabulous story, told by antiquity and by Herodotus at the forefront, that cinnamon and casia are from the nests of birds, especially of the phoenix . . . and that they are brought down from inaccessible cliffs and trees by the weight of meat which the birds themselves carry off or by arrows weighted with lead . . . for by these lies the inhabitants increase the prices of their goods.

It is tempting in all these paired passages, as elsewhere,<sup>9</sup> to see the results of separate sources with substantially different (if not conflicting) points of view.

But the written word need not have been the only influence. Numerous traditions (popular, educated, national, etc.) and the intellectual atmosphere of the society in which he lived must have been felt often, quite independently of what

was transcribed in his notebooks. His remark in 10.138 that it would be better to talk about acknowledged facts (*de confessis*) suggests strongly that he had been consciously attacking stories which educated readers would question anyhow. In 37.40-41 he rejects the story about the tears of the meleagrids (birds) as the source of amber, suggesting that anybody—even children—would recognize its falseness and improbability, and adding the obvious commonplace that the poets offer "multa aequae falsa." In 8.80 the reference to a popular tradition implies the existence of an educated tradition as well. He says that "we ought confidently to regard as false" the story of werewolves or else accept all the tales found fictitious during the ages; then he promises to explain the origin of the popular tradition about them (*unde ista vulgo infixa sit fama*). He speaks with disapproval in 2.23-24 of a growing contemporary interest in astrology (a science attacked with care in 7.160-165) and omens, yet a few paragraphs later (2.66) he succumbs to this interest momentarily by linking the course of the planet Venus with the births of wild animals (cf. also 9.71 and 11.37). But perhaps most germane to a discussion of the influence of traditions upon Pliny's opinions are the rather numerous passages (e.g. 2.248; 8.82; 19.86; 28.112) which are scornful of the Greeks. These seem to square with Cato's words (quoted by Pliny, *HN* 29.14) belittling their medical accomplishments and, for that matter, with Juvenal's unkind references to *Graeculi* and those who would imitate the Greeks. Yet again, in 7.8, he is willing to counter this tradition<sup>10</sup> and, of course, cites Cato's own fleeting concession along with other examples of Roman respect for Greek achievements (7.112-113).

Pliny's admittedly inconsistent attempts at skepticism should not, however, be explained only in terms of authorities and contemporary traditions. There is surely a personal element as well. When he says (10.35), "I know of several instances in which it . . . did not prove

9. For other contrasts compare 8.72 with 10.136; 10.40 with 25.14; and 10.3 with 10.127. But also compare 6.70 with 7.26; these passages (to judge from their contexts) probably derive from Megasthenes, despite their different emphases. Caspar (p. 35) is undoubtedly justified in saying that "to maintain . . . that simply because he did not add some word of doubt or disapproval when recounting certain portents he thought them significant and credible is to draw unwarranted conclusions." However, the exx. of positive disagreements are sufficiently numerous to make it clear that Pliny was not always consistent.

10. Kroll (cols. 411-412), with reference to the use of literary conventions, notes (*inter alia*) the discourse against navigation in 19.5-7 and points of contact with the satirists in 14.5 (legacy hunting), 123 (depilatories for men), and 137 (intemperance). He links the jibes against the Greeks to Pliny's patriotism in a fine passage on the latter (cols. 417-418). As for superstition, he finds (col. 414) various strata, including popular errors, folk medicine, and magic; all these could naturally come to Pliny either from contemporary society or his written sources.

fatal" (cf. also 26.123), he shows that, if he took time to think, he could reject a claim on the basis of his own experience. Further, he realized that each man ought to investigate for himself (17.29-30): "There are certain deeply concealed details in all things which each individual must, with his own intellect, seek out . . . , [for] matters long since investigated and settled often do change." This is not mere theorizing; Pliny, in actual practice, did not stop with just the first literary or technical authority to come to hand (cf. 7.27). His will to range about to get at the facts is illustrated by his use of late census records (7.162-164) to test theories about human longevity, his use of earlier sources to supplement the statements of later ones (e.g. Cato to supplement Varro), his references to the first-hand reports of travellers to supplement data from written geographies (e.g. 5.14 and 6.23 and 146), and his use of trade information about the values of products on the market in *HN* 12, 13, 33, 35, and elsewhere.<sup>11</sup> This is not the procedure of a lazy man.

What happened to him seems reasonably clear in *HN* 30 where he is attempting to present a mass of material of highly superstitious origin, and hence his skepticism and credulity are both frequently called into play. The first eighteen paragraphs, while incidentally a history of the Magi, are intended as a refutation of their claims; the rest of the book catalogues a series of their remedies. Whatever the reason (be it the wording of a source, educated tradition, or personal belief), the opening paragraphs are highly skeptical; the next sixty, however, contain very few protests and seem to be a bare summary of sympathetic authors; but sporadic protests are encountered once more in the latter part of the book, starting around 30.80. Seemingly Pliny begins within the framework of the tradition (as old as the laws of the Twelve Tables) of Roman hostility to the practitioners of magic; then, as he reports remedy after remedy for fear of omitting anything of value (cf. 30.137), he fails insensibly under the spell of the written word of his sources, and it is only after certain especially distasteful and improbable remedies that he returns (possibly on his own personal impulse) to a more skeptical mood. But apart from these relatively obvious expressions of skepticism, the over-all tone of *HN* 30

is not one of abject acceptance. Pliny's tongue may have been in his cheek here even when he appears most trusting. Qualifying words and phrases like *multi . . . censent* (33), *dicitur* (42), *tradunt* (74), *sunt qui . . . censeant* (102), and *putant* (132) are everywhere to be found. Conceivably a persistent toothache could have driven him to try the remedies in 30.21, but his response to a direct question about almost any treatment in the book would, in all probability, have been a rather nervous (but intellectually compelled) "Non credo."

That his skeptical remarks here and elsewhere are often sincere seems beyond question (even though he may elect to paraphrase a source in giving voice to them). But his skepticism blurs and fades away—at times he seems to forget it. His mind, despite occasional valiant endeavors, did not constantly wrestle with the implications of his subject matter. He could not, with the deep-rooted confidence of Horace (*Sat.* 1.5.100-101), say, "*Credat Iudaeus Apella; I have learned . . . !*" He was a busy man—a busy official and a busy reader—and the busy Pliny could not give Pliny the thinker time to let his mind ask more of the right questions. The bigger the task and the more closely we are crushed by time, the more all save the best minds are inclined to accept the answer which is at hand rather than seek the deeper truth which may well be camouflaged by tradition or misunderstanding.

\* \* \*

This paper has sought to explain the shifting combinations of credulity and skepticism in the work of the Elder Pliny. Their origins have been found, at least in considerable part, in the interplay of the ideas of his sources, in the traditions of his day, and, of course, in the energetic and inquiring yet superstitious and receptive nature of the man himself. He was not an original, creative thinker, nor a pioneer of research to be compared either with Aristotle and Theophrastus or with any of the great moderns. He was, rather, the compiler of a secondary sourcebook. This work, for any given area (like ornithology or botany), is roughly comparable to a modern textbook or, perhaps more exactly, to the now very numerous, semidetailed, summarizing handbooks which are intended to serve as quickly usable catalogues of data. Such works are rarely regarded as first rate even in

11. For a discussion of the price lists see D. Detlefsen, "Die Wertangaben in der *Naturalis Historia* des Plinius," *Hermes* 35 (1900) 585-601.

their own age,<sup>12</sup> for they are too near the norm of the day both in the statements they reflect and in the caliber of their authorship.

Pliny was not the sort of person to depart far from the standards of his contemporaries—his was a mind “of a very ordinary type.”<sup>13</sup> In his rather numerous, but always highly unsteady attempts at skepticism we get a vivid impression of how exhausting the task must have been to sift through the almost unlimited fund of conflicting sources, a process which was practically unavoidable in an age when quick physical access to more than a small fraction of the known world was impossible. Without extensive travel and much personal observation and research the only likely avenue of success in compiling a comprehensive work like the *Natural History* would inevitably seem to lie in obtaining the broadest possible base of information through wide reading and the extended study of documents and reports. The comparison of statements inescapably points up problems and forces some decisions (cf. 8.48 *fin.*). That Pliny succeeded at all in evaluating his material is a credit, not to his training, but to his eternal curiosity and his sleepless desire to get the opinion of every available authority.

GRUNDY STEINER

NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

#### A LIST OF CLASSICAL SOCIETIES

Plans have been made to publish in a May issue of this magazine a preliminary list of classical societies in the United States and Canada. Compilation of data has been undertaken by Mr. John F. Reilly, Sacred Heart High School, Yonkers, N. Y., of the CW staff, with the assist-

12. Cf. André Labhardt, “Quelques témoignages d’auteurs latins sur la personnalité et l’œuvre de Pliny l’Ancien,” *Mélanges . . . Niedermann* (Neuchâtel 1944). Labhardt feels (p. 114) that it was the judgement of St. Jerome that gave Pliny standing and respectability; that pagan antiquity was doubtful about him at best, never according him sincere and high praise.

13. Cf. W. H. S. Jones, in the Loeb Classical Library Pliny (Cambridge, Mass., 1951) Vol. 6, p. xx. With Jones’ remarks there about Pliny’s dilemma, compare the suggestions (*italics mine*) of C. H. Herford quoted in the introduction (p. xii) to the Everyman edition of Sir Thomas Browne’s *Religio Medici* (London 1906): “Our interest is ‘on the dangerous edge of things’:

‘The honest thief, the tender murderer,  
The superstitious Atheist.’”

ance of Dr. Emory E. Cochran, Fort Hamilton High School, Brooklyn.

A questionnaire has been circulated among officials of all groups of whose work we have learned requesting brief information on official title; names (and affiliations) of officers; some account of the work of the society; current program; membership and dues; publications.

We especially bespeak the cooperation of officials of all groups concerned in making this list as comprehensive as possible. The attested existence of numerous local societies and groups of restricted membership that have come to our attention suggests that there may be many others that we have not been able to contact. Material for incorporation in this list should reach the editorial office by May 1, 1955.

## REVIEWS

*The Farwell Collection.* By FRANKLIN P. JOHNSON. (“Monographs on Archaeology and Fine Arts Sponsored by The Archaeological Institute of America and The College Art Association of America,” VI.) Cambridge, Mass.: Archaeological Institute of America, 1953. Pp. viii, 76; figs. 90. \$5.00.

This volume, printed in Germany for the Archaeological Institute of America, is well done, with very few misprints. It is an unusual publication in that it publishes an excavation which in normal times would have been an act contrary to law — the opening of ancient graves without official permission, by Capt. O. O. Farwell, a military officer untrained in archaeology, while stationed at Cerignola, about 23 miles from Foggia. One wonders how Capt. Farwell could get so much time off from his duties, but we admire him for excavating at Ortona, the ancient Herdonia, in south-eastern Italy, some twenty graves, keeping good notes and sending to America 209 pieces of pottery, of which 104 belong to fifteen grave groups. Others came from his first few graves, which were not recorded or purchased. Unfortunately a sword, a silver fibula, and beads from a child’s grave were lost.

Seventeen pieces of pottery were presented to the National Museum in Washington and the rest were sent to the University of Chicago to be studied by Franklin P. Johnson, who has done so with his usual meticulous precision, exact, broad and accurate knowledge, and acute

acumen in ferreting out from unsystematic records, wrong tags, misplaced labels, and photographs, difficult facts about provenance, position and origin. Dr. Johnson has cleaned and pieced together many fragments with great patience. This is certainly the largest collection of Daunian pottery outside of Italy. I have only a few specimens, and so Toronto, Boston, New York. It is to be hoped that the collection, which has been returned to Captain Farwell in Detroit, will ultimately be bequeathed to an archaeological museum.

The pottery falls into three classes, two large and one small. The first class consists of 91 pieces made by hand, the second of 106 pieces made on the wheel. These are Italic with some Greek influence in the second. The third class of 11 pieces are Italiote with strong Attic influence. Some of the handmade pieces are as late as some of the wheelmade. The wheelmade do not belong to common forms. After a nine-page introduction all the pieces are minutely catalogued with careful description of each piece, and the grave groups reconstructed.

Chapter III deals with technique and chapter IV with the pottery according to form: kraters, jugs, bowls, oinochoai, flasks, etc. The forbears of some are Attic (some c. 450 B.C. as parallels from Olynthus and Athens show). Many parallels are cited. The small bowls or saucers of which we found so many at Olynthus are given the distinctive name "ashtray" with the statement (52) that "It cannot give rise to misunderstanding." They certainly were not ashtrays or even lamps: Beazley better calls them "dishes." Those at Olynthus were probably used for salt or sweetmeats or nuts, or for small offerings of food or drink to the gods. Of about 439 found (200 in 1928 and 1931, 175 in 1934, and 64 in 1938; these not mentioned by Johnson, but cf. *Olynthus*, 10. 355-365) only six came from the cemeteries. They are Attic of the fifth and fourth centuries (several found in Rhodes and Samos). Some "ashtrays" are Etruscan or Italiote but their origin is Attic or Olynthian. Another type (53), the lekanis, is paralleled by a pre-Persian example at Olynthus (*Olynthus* 13, pl. 4) and East Greek pieces, but those published by Johnson differ and are native Italiote. Olynthus and Rhodes also show the Attic origin of the bowls from grave XIII 9 (56), also the bolsal Z 41 (*Olynthus*, 5. 546 f; 13. 654 f). For askoi (71-72) cf. *Olynthus*, 13. 255-264. For stamped ware (32-33) a reference to many Greek examples, even in the fifth century, could be

given (*Olynthus* 5 and 13 *passim*). On the other hand the absence of certain types at Olynthus proves the non-Attic origin of many of the vases in the Farwell Collection (54).

On the vases called "owls" (Z 43), cf. *Studies Presented to David M. Robinson*, 2. 96-105, Johnson's own excellent article with a better and clearer illustration than in Fig. 70, where the owl can barely be seen. The other illustrations, except in Figs. 88 and 89, where I fear it is not true that the unclear "photographs will aid in future study of the inscription," are excellent. Most of the vases belong to the fourth century. The earliest graves may go back to the sixth century and one may be of the third century. There are two appendices, one on graves excavated by Angelucci, another on Daunian vases at Chicago, and a third appendix on the Arkesilaos vase.

This is certainly one of the most scholarly books on Daunian and native Italic vases of recent years. Every student of Roman history and archaeology should know it.

DAVID M. ROBINSON

UNIVERSITY, MISSISSIPPI

## BOOKS RECEIVED

- ALLEN, JAMES T., and GABRIEL ITALIE. *A Concordance to Euripides*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press; London: Cambridge University Press, 1954. Pp. xi, 686. \$10.00.
- CATALANO, VIRGILIO. *Storia di Ercolano*. Preface by AMEDEO MAIURI. Napoli: Patronato di Resina, 1953. Pp. 125; 21 ill. L. 600.
- KATZ, SOLOMON. *The Decline of Rome and the Rise of Mediaeval Europe*. ("The Development of Western Civilization.") Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1955. Pp. xii, 164. \$1.25.
- MEYER, CARL. *Die Urkunden im Geschichtswerk des Thukydides*. ("Zetemata," Heft 10.) München: C. H. Beck, 1955. Pp. viii, 102. DM 9.50.
- SHERLEY-PRICE, LEO (trans.). *Bede, A History of the English Church and People*. ("Penguin Classics," L42.) Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd.; Baltimore: Penguin Books Inc., 1955. Pp. 341. \$0.85.
- UNGER, URSULA. *Alexander Pope und die klassisch-lat-einische Literatur*. ("Schweizer Anglistische Arbeiten: Swiss Studies in English," Bd. 36.) Bern: Francke Verlag, 1954. Pp. 166. S. Fr. 12.
- ZUCKER, FRIEDRICH. *Isokrates' Panathenaiikos*. ("Berichte über die Verhandlungen der sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig, Philol.-Hist. Kl.," Bd. 101, Heft 7.) Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1954. Pp. ii, 31. DM 1.50.